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ABSTRACT

In order to better understand this paper, it is important to consider the process and context in which it was prepared. The paper was written and presented at the Austin conference and reflects the author's efforts as a participant-conceptualizer who spent a good deal of time visiting and listening to as many task groups as possible. He dropped his own notions of needed conceptual directions in community psychology and concentrated on obtaining the essential generated at the conference itself. The procedure was enhanced by audio taping, and a good deal of the paper consists of the thoughts and complete statements made by a variety of participants at the conference. These were extracted from the tapes and woven into an organized form. In an important sense, then, this is not a singularly authored paper, but one that reflects, at least in part, the issues and concerns of many people at the conference. Narrative was minimally edited in an effort to preserve the spontaneity of the presentation. (Author/CJ)

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Experiencing Community Psychology

Reflections of a Participant-Conceptualizer [1,2,3] at the Austin Conference

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2 This paper was retitled from "Current and future models for training community psychologists" following a change in task at the National Training Conference in Community Psychology, Austin, 1975.

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Experiencing Community Psychology: Reflections of a Participant-Conceptualizer at the Austin Conference

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Introductory Note

In order to better understand this paper, it is important to consider the process and context in which it was prepared. The paper was written and presented at the Austin conference and reflects my efforts as a participant-conceptualizer there. I spent a good deal of time visiting and listening to as many task groups as I could. I tried to drop my own notions of needed conceptual directions in community psychology and instead concentrated on obtaining the essential themes generated at the conference itself. The procedure was enhanced by audio taping, and a good deal of the paper consists of the thoughts and complete statements made by a variety of participants at the conference. These were extracted from the tapes and woven into an organized form. In an important sense, then, this is not a singularly authored paper, but one that reflects, at least in part, the issues and concerns of many people at the conference. The subsequent narrative was minimally edited to preserve the spontaneity of the presentation occasionally at the expense of proper grammatical form. Hopefully, the paper conveys some of the essence of the Austin conference.

1. The first major theme that I heard at the conference was that of change. Change this, change that, everybody was into changing something. More specifically, questions that were addressed were "How do we implement change?" How

do we change individuals? How do we change groups? How do we change organizations? How do we change social systems? And how do we assess this change? How do we know we have made a change? Especially, the total effect of a change--both the intended and the unintended consequences. I will elaborate on this point a little bit later. Other questions centered on such issues as: How do we maintain change? How do we build change into permanence?

I should note that although we talked a lot about promoting positive change, there was some discussion of reducing negative change which I think should be considered. The notion of preservation--the preservation of adaptive aspects of individuals, groups, and systems, that we see receding in our culture today. So that is one conceptual area that we will have to address. We will have to get a better understanding of what change means.

2. The second issue that we need to address is power. There were several ramifications of the theme of power across groups. These relate to our own sense of power vis-a-vis, individuals, groups and institutions. "Who are we to suggest things to people?" This issue dichotomizes somewhat into "Are we going to be leaders. Are we going to be telling individuals and groups what to do?" or "Are we going to be developing collaborative interactions where we work together?" Another issue related to power was a concern about our power with relation to our own institutional base. What can community psychologists do within and without, and outside of particular institutions? The concept of power also has implications for individuals - the power of individuals to make choices and to control their own destiny. It also includes institutional power over individuals, and notions of the power dynamics in the community.

We talk about power, and it is interesting. I am sure there will be people who will misunderstand. "There you go, that is what community psychologists

were after all along--your own power." And I think that this misunderstanding if it does occur, reflects just the issue that I am trying to highlight. Because I do not think power is understood. Power is also effectance. It has been traditionally associated with hoarding, greed, and self-aggrandizement. What we have got to do is promote alternative conceptions of power. The power of rationality, the power of patience, the power of empathy, the power of consensus and the power of effective change. I think that helplessness, in our culture, seems to be moving in there next to "mom and apple pie."

3. The third theme that I saw addressed across groups was interdependence. Essentially the question is, "What goes with what?" What are the ecological relationships? This is reflected in terms of multiple inputs--coordinating entry, and perhaps more important, multiple outcomes--multiple changes as a result of our interventions. This is mentioned in the following concern. "Do we know enough to make interventions? If we promote change in one area, are we preventing change in another?" We have to explore the concepts of intended and unintended consequences. We are accustomed to thinking in a linear fashion--input-output, side effects, drop-outs, and we have to begin to discover relationships. We have to discover relationships--in individuals, between values, attitudes and behavior; interrelationships between groups; interrelationships within systems; and interrelationships between institutions.

4. The fourth common concern, and theme that has to be addressed in community psychology is to discover the relationships between the person and the environment. "Person and environment fit" as it is often talked about. It is clear that this is a reciprocal relationship. That is, environments affect people, but people also affect environments. It is also fairly clear that the relationship between person and environments is not going to be isomorphic. That

is, if you change environments in one way, then you don't directly and proportionally change individuals in the same way. Understanding this relationship is going to be one of our most difficult challenges.

5. The fifth theme that links us is an appreciation of history. Within this general area are many conceptual issues that need to be addressed. These include the history of the individual, i.e., developmental motions. We are used to thinking in terms of simplified concepts like immaturity to maturity, and we have to consider more complex developmental notions. We also have to address, in terms of history, how social systems evolve. What is the developmental sequence of organizational growth? What changes can we expect to occur in institutions as they grow? And within this area, interesting enough when we talk about history, we also have to talk about the future and the creation of future settings (e.g., Sarason, 1972).

6. The sixth general area that I think reflects a lot of our concerns deals with the criteria for optimal functioning. "What is and how do we define optimal functioning in individuals, in systems, and in societies?" For example, when institutions are optimally functioning do they hum? What do they do? We don't know yet. We may be left with relative levels of optimal functioning. This whole area needs to be explored.

When we talk about optimal functioning in individuals, we got into the concept of competence. We talk about ecological matches on another level. On the societal level, using Jack Glidewell's (1975) framework, we talk about the cultural concerns of reducing pain and social conflict, as well as increasing enhancement, and the equitable distribution of justice.

Related to the criteria for optimal functioning is a concern that we don't get into the clinical trap. That we don't only get wrapped up in social problems,

but we look at creative and positive alternatives. We look at what we can find to be optimally functioning systems. We need to do this in order to create alternatives. Projects such as intentional communities (Rhodes, 1975), from which to draw resources for ideas to input into less well functioning systems, are important and need to be supported.

7. The seventh area is the need for new conceptions of evaluation. This deals with such process issues as methodologies; that we develop new methodologies appropriate to our interventions. Common concerns related to "What is the effect of current evaluation strategies on limiting what we can evaluate?" It is clear to me that current psychological methodologies may not be able to handle the questions that we are trying to address. In fact, they may curtail knowledge rather than enhance it. Most of the statistical methodologies that we find in our curriculum are, as I understand it, based on the agricultural model, a linear model. They may be good for raising tomatoes but how applicable they are to people is not all that clear yet. We have to develop new methodologies while maintaining our critical perspective. We should not excuse the need to develop new methodologies from not being critical about what we are doing. To paraphrase Ed Trickett (1975), our concern with traditional psychology is that it has lost its heart and soul, and our potential concern is that community psychology may loose its mind.

Another question that was commonly addressed was "What is the effect of data?" "What is the effect of our evaluations upon change." I call this research on the critical edge "research to know versus research to change." The pioneering work of Fairweather (e.g. 1967, 1972) is especially important to consider here.

I'd like to give you an example, in terms of research to know and research to change. I did some research in the state training school setting. We spent

almost a year on the wards observing upward of 13,000 interactions between aides and children. We found that the average child in the state training school on this particular ward, receives a total of 4.5 minutes of formal training a day (Chinsky, 1975) and this training is distributed inequitably. We also have data to show that if the child is more attractive, he/she gets far more positive interactions than if he/she is not attractive; and the number of positive interactions is independent of objective mental level (Dailey, Allen, Chinsky, & Veit, 1974).

I have that data. What do I do with it? How do we affect change on the basis of that kind of data? I could cite, and we could all cite, numerous examples of turning up data. We do have some sense of data about some sense of problems. The question is "How do we turn that data into action?" And that was a common concern at the Austin conference.

8. The next issue that I want to address is what I call the "wheelbarrow" area, to borrow from an anecdote that Jack Glidewell made at the conference. "Can we push the wheelbarrow while we sit in it?" Another way of conceptualizing this is the "community psychology of community psychology." This has several ramifications and introduces a lot of tension areas. The issues of social values got us hung up at the conference and it is clear why they did. Because many of us are members of particular groups and classes that we see in our data and by our observations are giving us benefits at the same time that they are oppressing and exploiting others. How do we deal with that irreconciliation?

How much change--this has to be raised to some level of consciousness--how much change do we really want to see; and are we potentially, covertly preventing change? We have to get into this issue and we have to put our values on the line. We want to preserve parts of the system. Obviously, parts of the system helped us out and are beneficial. Some of us moved up, using the educational system and now

we want to help others use the positive aspects of the system. We need alternatives here.

Another implication, in terms of the community psychology of community psychology, is how do we build intra- and inter-professional networks? "Who are the allies? And where and how do we go for help and ideas?" We need to lay out the interrelationships between community psychology and other disciplines. In the same light, one of the best things that I think is going to come out of this conference is a sense of community of our community; a sense of community of Division 27. And for all that is said and done, I have a feeling that is going to be the most powerful and most potent outcome of the conference.

Another related issue that we have to address is who are our constituency? Who are we writing for, who are we conceptualizing for, each other, or the people in the community, or both? This issue has to be addressed. Who is giving us the credit? Who is promoting us? Whose reinforcement schema are we really working under? To paraphrase Caplan and Nelson (1973) in their article "On Being Useful" they said that people who please those above them move up in the system. Those who please people below them are frequently considered charlatans and freaks and not "professionals." Again, this has to be addressed.

9. The last theme and a very important one for me is how do we develop or redevelop our experience base? This is not just my concern, but a concern relevant to the whole conference. How do our experiences catch up with our conceptualizations? How do we make contact with, understand, experience, and, observe, diverse groups, individuals, settings-the community? This is a complex question because it means interacting with people who don't necessarily share our ideologies and I will tell you a secret, it probably means working with people who don't think "psychology." This is really important to me and I am going to finish on this note.

This is very personal. I am going to tell a little anecdote about my own history, because I think it also reflects a lot of other people's history at my level.

I grew up in a candy store. My father owned the candy store and I worked in the candy store through adolescence, through college, up to the time I went up to graduate school at Rochester. I noticed as I went to school--I got a state scholarship so I went to school and I learned about psychology--the more I learned about psychology, the more I went up in the educational ladder, the less did that experience relate to the people in the candy store. I could not talk to them anymore; I was moving away from them. I went into psychology because I wanted to--naively, I was seventeen when I started--I wanted to help people. So I got the idea, as naively as it sounds, to go into clinical psychology. I found that clinical psychology didn't really help the people in the store. They didn't understand it; it was too expensive; it was on a different conceptual level; and it wasn't relevant to them. Community, it seems to me, has the opportunity to relate to those people.

In one sense, if we combine our own biographies with history, in one sense, we can conceptualize what is now going on in community psychology as a group of people who came up from the working class entered academics, looked around and found that it wasn't relevant and, decided that now we want to change it. So we have to bring psychology back and consider what are the real issues.

It is kind of ironic; we talked a lot about Barker at the conference, and I remember reading Barker and one thing that was mentioned was the fact that Barker (1968) did some detailed observations in the fountain of a corner drug store much like the candy store in which I grew up. It seems that now they are telling me, quite ironically, that's where the action was all the time. I think we all have to remember our own "candy stores." We can do this in two ways. The first is to remember our personal ties to the community. The second is to continuously integrate our work with the "real" world. We must understand the community, relate to the community, and bring our conceptions to bear in the community, if we are truly to have a psychology of the community.

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